

CIVIL WAR HISTORY CONSORTIUM RESEARCH

Report of Phase 1

Interviews with Partners and Potential Partners

December 2005

Background and Objectives

An opportunity exists to assemble the rich historical assets of the Philadelphia region and coordinate the interpretation of the region as an important and rewarding Civil War history destination. The Civil War History Consortium (CWHC) – a group of organizations and individuals dedicated to exploring this vision – has been convened to assess the viability of this opportunity and develop a strategic plan for going forward if so determined.

In order to assist the Civil War History Consortium in this effort, The Melior Group is conducting primary research with partners and potential partners of CWHC, regional community stakeholders, and key audiences. This research will consist of in-depth interviews, focus groups and a benchmark consumer survey.

Key objectives of the research are to:

- Identify the key themes and areas of value which will be essential to develop and interpret the regional Civil War history experience;
- Determine how best to position and market the region's Civil War treasures to target audiences; and
- Identify optimal marketing approaches for the venture and the overall potential for success.

This report summarizes findings of the first phase of the research – interviews with partners and potential partners – and contains recommendations for the second phase – interviews and focus groups with regional stakeholders. The third phase will consist of a broader consumer market evaluation.

Research Method

Research in this phase was conducted as a series of telephone and in-person in-depth interviews with key individuals at organizations that are partners and potential partners of CWHC and other experts and thought leaders. These individuals are in leadership positions. Organizations include: historical societies, museums with a historical focus, historical sites, organizations with a relevant focus such as abolition or African-American genealogy, churches with historical roots in the Civil War era, and other similar institutions. Individuals with a special expertise, such as history professors and tourism professionals, were also included. A list of the interviewees is included in the Appendix to this report.

CWHC reviewed and provided input to the discussion guide developed for the interviews by The Melior Group and also supplied Melior with a list of names for most of the interviews. Potential interviewees were alerted to the interview request by an email (letter for non-email recipients) from CWHC informing them of the research and requesting their cooperation. Melior also solicited names of additional potential interviewees from these interviews and conducted interviews with some of them.

A total of 26 interviews were completed during this first phase of the research.

Key Findings

Overview

On balance, the individuals interviewed in this phase agreed that there is an opportunity for Philadelphia to be established as an important Civil War history destination. Although significant challenges to this venture were noted, interviewees largely agreed that:

- The historical assets of the region – physical and otherwise – are significant and of sufficient interest, depth and diversity to attract target audiences.
- The Philadelphia region’s Civil War story is compelling to select audiences in part because it can tell some important and often under-told stories.
 - Some of these Civil War era stories are about the struggles on the homefront – battles of conscience to protect and free slaves, medical care for the casualties of war, and the continuing unfolding of the quest for freedom begun in Philadelphia in the 18th century.
 - Other themes and stories – some overlapping – are in the voices of those not often heard – African-Americans, women, ethnic groups who toiled in the city, Quakers involved in the abolition movement, and others.

- Likely audiences for this experience include African-Americans, history buffs, international tourists, and schoolchildren. Interviewees were divided on whether or not Civil War buffs – the traditional passionate battlefield visitors – will be a promising target. Some said that this visitor segment would be a natural audience for the Philadelphia Civil War story, while others felt strongly that Philadelphia as a Civil War destination would appeal to alternative audiences.
- Major strengths of the Philadelphia area include the built environment – 19th century buildings and sites – and the importance in this region of industrialists and financiers involved in the War and its aftermath.
- Philadelphia’s strengths as a historic destination are also an obstacle to the Civil War venture. The region is overwhelmingly identified with the Colonial era and the Revolutionary War. Making an effective connection to the Civil War may require building a thematic bridge – in messages and focus – from the important 18th century story.

Assessing Regional Assets

Cataloguing the wealth of material available to tell the Philadelphia Civil War story is an essential part of assessing the viability of this venture. The experts and key organizational leaders interviewed in this phase cite a wide variety of materials, sites and stories integral to the Civil War era – both in their own organizations’ purview and known to them elsewhere.

Chief among these are:

- Archived materials – public records, church and other organizational documents, and family and other private documents – that relate to the era in a number of ways. From the National Archives to the Library Company of Philadelphia to the local county historical societies, collections are available to give both official and personal glimpses into almost all aspects of the society, economy, and public issues of the period.
- Physical sites, such as the Underground Railroad houses, Laurel Hill Cemetery, and the LaMott encampment, illustrate and give power to different and specific elements of the history of this period. In addition, the streetscape of Philadelphia – the commercial buildings on Chestnut and Market Streets stretching to the Delaware from Washington Square, the mansions in historic Germantown built by textile trade wealth – preserves the industrial and economic story of the Civil War. As one interviewee stated it, *“There is more historic fabric in Germantown than in all of Colonial Williamsburg.”*

- The stories, some of which have been under-told. Experts and key organizational leaders interviewed in this phase see the availability of compelling themes and stories as a critical strength of the region’s historical “treasure.” These also give voice to those individuals and groups who have often been marginalized in traditional interpretations of the era. These stories include:
 - African-American participation in, and leadership of the abolition movement, and as Union soldiers (the 3rd Regiment).
 - Efforts to shelter slaves, to help them gain their freedom, and to improve their condition through education and other means when they became free.
 - Women’s involvement in the social movements of the time and their leadership in homefront activities to support the Army (e.g., the Sanitary Fair of 1864).
 - Care for the wounded and advances in medicine as treating large numbers of the injured was necessitated by the War (e.g., Mower Hospital).
 - Most importantly, the theme of the War as the “second great test of the Constitution” and a continued working out of the quest for freedom for all.

The key strength of these assets is, in the words of one CWHC partner, their ability to put *“a focus on the authentic, real stories of real people and to broaden the notion of Civil War history to include everyone.”*

Key Audiences

Those interviewed saw the strongest prospective visitor segments as those who are most touched by, and involved with these stories. They tend to be individuals with an open and questing mind who find the complex truths more interesting than the broad gloss often given to important historical moments. These include African-Americans, women, and school-age children, as well as the heritage traveler segment (heritage travelers are tourists who seek specific historic- and place-based experiences as part of their leisure travel). Some niche markets for the venture may include those with an interest in medical history, academics, and individuals with an overall interest in social and progressive movements.

- Some experts and organizational leaders felt that the audience for the Philadelphia Civil War experience would be largely an “alternative” to the traditional Civil War buff. Philadelphia is the “anti-battlefield” experience – centered, essentially, on the homefront – and not a likely draw for the buff.
- Others felt that the Civil War buff was an important potential audience for the Philadelphia experience. The proximity of Gettysburg to Philadelphia would make Philadelphia a likely destination for this segment, according to some of the

interviewees. In Philadelphia, they could visit another “*authentic site with a preserved historic heritage.*”

Determining whether or not the Civil War buff segment is an appropriate target may be a topic for later research phases of this project. It was certainly something upon which these experts and thought leaders did not agree. One interviewee opined that the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg had depended on this segment to visit in large numbers and that this strategy had been, in this interviewee’s opinion, a “*miserable failure.*”¹

Viability and Optimal Marketing Approaches

Most of the experts and organization leaders interviewed said that building awareness would be the first challenge of the effort as awareness of Philadelphia as a potential Civil War history destination is very low, even among institutions. “*Philadelphia is not the first city you would think of [in the Civil War history context].*”

Their assessment of the potential viability of marketing Philadelphia as a Civil War history destination was mixed, but on balance positive as long as conditions for sufficient support are met. Interviewees noted these requirements as the following:

“It is entirely dependent on how the story is told.”

“Our strength is our rich history but we need coordination and we need to be on the same page.”

“It needs money and someone to really drive the train.”

Marketing the Philadelphia area is also seen as most effective if driven by; 1) interpreting the assets of the region as part of an overarching story or theme (e.g., the quest for freedom by ordinary people made extraordinary by their struggle); and, 2) understanding audiences’ needs and preferences.

Additional tactics to enhance the marketing effort were suggested:

- Emphasize Civil War history as a companion to the story told by the National Constitution Center – Philadelphia as a “place of conscience.”
- Tackle one theme to start and/or focus on a big event – for example, the Civil War sesquicentennial in 2010.

¹ Attendance at the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg declined almost 30% in 2004 to 53,844 paying visitors from 76,119 in 2002. Attendance in the museum’s first year was 87,131. Source: Berg, Joel, “*Civil War museum’s attendance plummets,*” *Central Penn Business Journal*, February 6, 2004.

- With a undergirding of thematic focus in place, implement visitor program material that is easy to access and enables visitors to navigate Philadelphia’s Civil War sites and treasures by:
 - Developing a website for prospective visitors with continually updated information and story-driven guidance;
 - Enhancing the guidance at the Visitor Center (“*Learn from Disney World – all the rides are open all the time*”).

Partner and Potential Partners’ Contributions

The ability for other organizations to contribute is limited by financial constraints. Most characterized themselves, if they in fact have Civil War-related assets, as able to participate in a passive way such as lending their collections or assisting with tours. This may reflect their wanting to wait to see the “plan” before making a commitment.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The results of this research phase demonstrate that there are some strong themes to be developed for prospective visitors. Ultimately, these will be built out as comprehensive programs and packages. At this point in the project, it is important to test some of these with consumer groups and thought leaders. It is recommended that the next phase of this project focus on exploring the appeal of some of the following concepts with these groups:

- Interpreting Philadelphia Civil War history as a story of the unfolding of the quest for freedom begun in the 18th century;
- Telling the stories of ordinary people who did extraordinary things – for example, abolitionists, individuals who sheltered people on the Underground Railroad, families on the homefront;
- Tracing the growth of industry in the 19th century – how the War shaped the fortunes of the industrialists and the lives of working people;
- Exploring the effect the War had on medical treatment – the challenges posed by the overwhelming number of wounded soldiers and the courage of doctors, nurses and laypeople as they grappled with the best way to care for them and treat their injuries.

These stories – and perhaps marketing messages that might accompany them – will be tested in focus groups and through in-depth interviews with the following segments:

- African-Americans with an interest in history and heritage
- Teachers
- Parents of school-age children
- Civil War experts and history professors
- Tourism industry professionals
- School and church communities tour organizers
- Potential funders of marketing programs for the Civil War venture

Outcomes from this phase will be:

- Two or more themes to be tested through a large-scale regional and/or national consumer survey.

- Further refinement of the assessment of the region's thematic treasures and readiness requirements as a Civil War destination (this will entail additional interviews from the expanded list of partners, potential partners, and experts from the first phase).